A Conversation with Nick Land (Part 2)

On Nick's convergences and divergences with Deleuze and Guattari and the Austrian economists, Yarvin's concept of sovereign property, politics as a friendly AI project, China, neoreaction, and more

VINCENT LÊ
JAN 19, 2026

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In Part 2 of my conversation with [Nick Land](), we discuss whether Deleuze and Guattari were capitalist roaders, Nick's convergences and divergences with the Austrian economists, how Yarvin's neglected concept of sovereign property is as revolutionary as Marx's critique of political economy, whether capitalism is universal, politics as a friendly AI project, China, and neoreactionary despair. If you missed Part 1, check it out [here]().

Vincent Lê: This brings us more directly to something I definitely want to discuss. I mean, we already are now, but maybe slightly more directly, which is how you see capitalism, your conception of capitalism. As these references to Hayek suggest, I think your conception is one that—it's by no means identical, I'm not saying that—but

it's probably closest to that developed by the Austrian School of economics. Most of my current research actually focuses on Austrian praxeology and that kind of thing. So I definitely want to touch on this for a little bit, as well as what we might call post-Austrians like Curtis Yarvin perhaps.

But just before we do so, and to sort of segue into that discussion—and feel free to veto this if it's too digressive.

Nick Land: Yeah, no problem.

Vincent Lê: I just had one related question, but it concerns more Deleuze and Guattari. That's because you initially developed this idea that capitalism and AI are in some sense structurally isomorphic through an engagement, of course, with Deleuze's and Guattari's schizoanalysis. At times in your written works, but also on X more recently, you go so far as to describe them as being almost crypto-capitalist roaders, at least in *Anti-Oedipus* before they seem to retreat from that programme to "destroy, destroy" in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

Now, this is a pretty controversial reading among Deleuzo-Guattarian scholars, because Deleuze and Guattari do seem to qualify at times, even in *Anti-Oedipus*, that capitalism reterritorializes and restratifies seemingly as much as it deterritorializes and melts everything solid into air—or into nanomolecular gray goo to give Marx's adage a bit of a software update. I think the most concise way Deleuze and Guattari say this in *Anti-Oedipus* is "everything returns or recurs: states, nations, families." And I know you have extremely little time for philosophical biographies, but it might be worth noting that, on a personal note, both Deleuze and especially Guattari were of course engaged in various left-wing causes and communist organizations and that kind of thing.

So if you don't mind, it's just something I've always wondered engaging with your work, it's just whether you think the Deleuze and Guattari—or at least the schizoanalytic programme that the two of them who were actually several developed in *Anti-Oedipus*—whether that was actually normatively *for* capitalism; and so, from that perspective, merely using left-wing rhetoric as a Straussian disguise in a post-May 68 Parisian intellectual climate where you would otherwise be hunted down by Alain Badiou and his paramilitary squad of Maoist Red Guards.

Nick Land: No one is safe from that. I think Badiou's article is called "Fascist Potatoes" or something.

Vincent Lê: Yes, exactly. "The Fascism of the Potato." So is that how you see Deleuze and Guattari? Or is it more that you just wanted to extrapolate and emphasize what they have to say about capitalism's deterritorializing dynamics, while being critical and leaving behind in the dust their caveats about its reterritorializing remnants?

Nick Land: Well, you know, I'd have to honestly say that I don't really care what they wanted. I definitely, as you are well aware, have learnt a lot from them at a certain time. But they have no authority as far as I'm concerned. Absolutely zero authority. So whatever reservations or theoretical concerns they have about the history of capitalism is for me completely irrelevant. If someone says, "do we know Deleuze and Guattari didn't like capitalism?" Whatever, that's their problem. That's France's problem. It's not my problem.

Obviously, the crucial thing is where they're saying: "not in the direction of the market." There's a very interesting analogue which I think is more relevant and contemporary than whatever, I don't know, what contemporary Deleuzianism is. I literally have no idea. I'm not in touch with it. But this is something that I think is happening more. It's basically the general program of this American Communist Party, which is an extremely weird organization. Now, I'm getting confused because I don't know the ins and outs of it. I'm sort of in direct contact with some of these ACP people. But the guy in this whole world—I don't think he's one of them—who's this guy called Jehu. I think @damn_jehu is his X tag. They're also communists. Their reading of the thing, of this whole process—Marx's reading, as they like to say, is what they're about. They are true Marxists. But their, as you said, normative recommendation, their program, is to accelerate the process. I think they probably call themselves accelerationists, going in the direction of the market. They think that, if you go in the direction of the market, it leads to this whole vision in which human labour is obsolesced entirely and then it's this free time model of communism. The historical function of capitalism by their reading is to obsolesce human labour.

Now, you know, I have lots of theoretical quibbles with that. But if they're saying, "so actually our recommendations are accelerationist," then I'm your brother. You know what I mean? It doesn't matter to me that your sense of where that goes is maybe not

where I think it goes. The people I think are actually anti-capitalist are anti-capitalist in the sense of wanting to actually have anti-accelerationist politics. So I slipped a little bit off your question, but that's the frame for me. It's like, insofar as Deleuze and Guattari are accelerationists, I love them. Insofar as they're not, I don't.

Vincent Lê: That's the one and only strictly scholastic question. With Jehu, from what I can tell of his positions in the last year or so—I mean, he definitely was coming there already—but I think that's actually to some extent your influence on him. He quotes you quite favorably and frequently now.

But I totally sympathize with your indifference to what Deleuze and Guattari are for or what they find good or bad… Because I'm still somewhat integrated in—you know, I teach at a university—in certain academic circles. One of the most common queries I get when I'm talking about accelerationism or AI and so on is: "but are you *for* this? What is your actual, how do you actually feel about this?" I tend to dismiss that as well as that's not really the point if you're looking at it from the point of view of critical philosophy, again, from a Kantian tradition.

Nick Land: Totally.

Vincent Lê: Okay, so although you've written less about the Austrian School than Deleuze and Guattari, you have made it clear on your former *Xenosystems* blog and elsewhere as well that your account of capitalism is definitely influenced to some extent by Austrian economists like Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk and Hayek. So I was wondering if we could fill in some details here and connect the dots a little bit.

What I'm tempted to just ask—it's a bit simplistic—is what you see as the main convergences and divergences between the Austrian account of capitalism and your own. Perhaps the convergences are somewhat more obvious, but I think the divergences might be interesting. I was also kind of wondering if there are—because it's not as if the Austrian School is completely unified. For example, I don't know if you come down on one side of the factional split that some Austrians like Murray Rothbard and Hans-Hermann Hoppe have sought to forge between Mises on the one hand and Hayek on the other. So I was also just wondering if there are specific Austrian economists who resonate with you the most in how you see capitalism.

Nick Land: It's slightly complicated, depending a little bit on the criteria. Like in the sense of general vibe, I really think Hayek is the guy for all the reasons that we've already said. His instincts are just in the tradition of spontaneous order so perfectly. And then in terms of systematic vision, Mises' *Human Action* is without parallel and obviously makes Hayek's writings look a little bit undergraduate by comparison. And then in terms of really quite, slightly, counter-intuitively brilliant insights about the nature of capital, I think probably Böhm-Bawerk has these moments where you think, wow, that really is something, that really crystallized something. It's a kind of counterintuitive moment of insight.

But overall, the point that I'd make about the Austrian School—and you're sort of coming to this obviously—is that I think Yarvin's response is hugely important. I think still underestimated. I don't think its time has come. I think Yarvin himself has lost track of quite how important what he was saying was, and that it's a kind of revolutionary break as definitive as Marx's basically conclusion of the classical traditional of political economy. Just to slightly, very quickly speed run through this a little bit: for one thing, the term political economy is an extremely important term, and it goes missing. It just disappears. People stop talking about political economy. It's got this historical feel about it. That itself is a really strange and interesting historical phenomenon that I think we can come back to a little bit.

The classical, traditional political economy establishes the labour theory of value. So, obviously, already in Adam Smith, with incredible intensity in Ricardo. In a way, Marx, despite the extreme magnitude of what he's doing, the way I would formulate it myself—as someone coming from the liberal side of this argument—is that he produces this massive *reductio ad absurdum* of the labour theory of value, such that classical political economy becomes impossible. I mean, it's over. It's not that it hasn't taught us a lot, and very, very important things have come out of it. But it's over once Marx shows what the labour theory of value ultimately entails if it's thrashed out in enormous systematic comprehension.

So then really strange cultural things happen to do with what is now like the ghost of political economy. Marx basically dismantles it into this whole base/superstructure model where he says: you've got different things going on here. You don't have the integrated science of political economy. There's the economy and then you've got these

harmonic resonance strata on top of that: law, politics, religion, probably in ascending order of implicit power. But for him, that's all irrelevant because they're all just resonant with the economy. So they will just be bourgeois law, bourgeois politics, and bourgeois religion. That's why the notion of having political economy doesn't make any sense anymore. These things are segmented and layered in this kind of cake.

You would then expect, with economics as a discipline and part of the superstructure, what are we going to get back—again, in inverted commas as much as you like—as "bourgeois capitalist" economics? In a way, that's the Austrian School. I totally think the Austrian School completely closes the Marxist system. I think it's totally right. I think the transformation system shows—that's why I call it the *reductio ad absurdum*—that that's what Marx is proving. He's proving that you end up with the transformation problem, and you have this fundamentally inconsistent, magnificent, intellectual cathedral, which is in its foundations classical political economy. On the top of that is Marxism. The transformation problem shows that that is a completely unsustainable, inconsistent intellectual enterprise. You've got to start again somewhere else. So you go to marginalism and they get everything there.

But the crucial thing to say about them is that the whole Austrian School has been this dissident side current. If we were living in a capitalist regime of anything like Marx's style, then Austrian economics would just be the reigning dominant, bourgeois, therefore ruling mode of economics. Instead, it's been associated with these utterly powerless, dissident, marginal currents. Paleolibertarianism most primarily. Libertarianism maybe let's say in general. The Mises Institute is this kind of backwards, weirdo place. You basically identify yourself as an utter political loser if you hang out at that place. As of course Moldbug says: "I was just hanging out there all the time at Mises Institute."

So you know what I mean? We don't have a capitalist superstructure. The marginality (no pun intended) of Austrian economics totally shows that. Instead, we have this Keynesian monstrosity at the worst.

So Moldbug leaves the Austrians very early. I think he's as libertarian in his intellectual trajectory as anyone has ever been. And he has this moment, just as Marx produces this massive conceptual breakthrough that ends a whole world with a distinction between labour and labour power, breaking down what he calls the cynical

identification in Ricardo of those two things. Surely they're not the same, that labour, when it's counted as the value of the commodity, going onto the market, is one thing. But labour, when it's accounted as reasonable remuneration to the worker, is a completely different thing. You know that extreme conceptual incision that really is so historically important. Moldbug does that with primary and secondary property—or you can say with the innovation of this notion of sovereign property.

I think this notion is so important, and I don't understand why no-one is chasing it. I don't know why Yarvin isn't. Because I think its, as I say, just to be repetitive, I think its historical function is as decisive as the absolute critical moment at which Marx terminates the tradition of classical political economy.

So if you're then saying: where am I with capitalism? I think, however you're going to end up doing it, it has to be done in terms of an understanding of sovereign property. I'm not going to say that Yarvin—or Moldbug as was his name when he was doing his interesting work on this—gets everything right. He's found this thing that just eats into and perpetuates patchwork neocameralism, which is his attempting to actually produce this systematic understanding where we go with the notion of sovereign property. But we have to go somewhere else with this notion of sovereign property. Because, without that notion, there's this hopeless naivety, which is the Austrian problem where you say: if we didn't live, if we could bracket off political reality, this would be how things work. And you cannot. You cannot bracket political reality as it's been shown impossible to bracket political reality. All of the thrashings about the libertarian tradition when it comes to politics are to do with the fact that you just can't, they haven't, it's not a solution within libertarianism to deal with that, to deal with the political problem.

That's what sovereign property is about. If you can't grapple with that, you're not really understanding how capitalism can exist as something historically real, rather than just as something that is a utopian model of what would take place within a securely liberal society in the classical sense of liberal.

Vincent Lê: Just to clarify: this is putting it a bit simplistically maybe, but sovereign property is the property or power of the cathedral, right? Is that what you mean by it?

Nick Land: Well, it is, but maybe that's kind of confusing to go there. It is, and we should circle back to it. But sovereign property is property that is not dependent on some sympathetic superior instance for its existence. So, say you do secondary property in Moldbug's terms. The property that we understand as property, you know, and all our capitalist accountancy and your cash value, your stocks, and all of this kind of stuff. All of that is secondary property because it is under the permission of the superior political authority. So, given a certain set of permissions by the superior political authority, then you are ultimately left and there you have property rights, the very notion of property rights. Because what is a property right? Something that's granted to you. Obviously, the liberal tradition of law has massive problems with the notion of property, formulating it strongly, precisely, because of that. Because if you have property rights, well, you can try and say that property rights come from God. But then it still needs some kind of conveyance through human politics. You can say, as the interesting trends in the Austrians say, the point is that if people, if political authorities abuse property rights, then reality will have its revenge. I mean, for sure, that's right as far as it goes. But it seems to me a stretch to go from that to say that therefore we can be confident that we're going to have at the end of the day secure property rights. I mean instead it's like people cycle through economic disasters and it's not at all that they feel disciplined by a libertarian sense of what is sound economic order or anything close to that. So sovereign property is property that is not dependent on this superordinate political instance for its existence. And that's Moldbug's model of what would instantiate that: a neocameral state where the state itself is a corporation. It therefore is a sovereign corporation, which actually ensures its own rights through the kind of things that states do, such as being a defense territory, protecting itself against outside enemies, and all of that kind of stuff that we expect to see from nation states. But we don't understand that as something that property is required to be capable of in order to actually reach the level of sovereignty.

So, yeah, I'll just say I remain fascinated by the whole neocameralism thing, and it's to me one of the most amazing intellectual adventures of the century. But I think ultimately what's important is the question that was driving that, rather than the conclusions that were reached. And I don't think libertarians are able to consistently avoid the question of sovereign property. It's like we have to tackle that. They don't. It's inconsistent. You can't have a theory of capitalism as an actually existing historical phenomenon if it doesn't understand how capitalism is actually able to defend itself

politically, without placating the question and fracturing it and saying that you vote for sympathetic politicians, or you channel funding to the political party that's going to be most respectful to property rights. But that seems to me to all be evading the basic question about how capital itself is secured.

Vincent Lê: This raises a lot of thoughts. Well, just one initial thing I'll say and then getting more direct. I find myself also torn a little bit between when you said that you find Hayek's your guy, but also Mises can make him look like an undergraduate. So, for me, I kind of am a bit torn between them, which is fine. I mean, I don't think you have to pick a side like Hoppe and Rothbard say. But certainly, Hayek, for the reasons that we've already discussed: it's this modeling of capital as a kind of cybernetic, complex, self-organizing system that emerges spontaneously, not through rational decisions. I mean, I think Mises' *Human Action* is maybe the greatest work of transcendental philosophy in the 20th century, maybe since Kant even. But Mises explicitly and repeatedly rejects the idea of the market as an autonomous machine. He'll acknowledge it's an emergent property, but it's always reducible to the conscious decisions of individual human agents or human actors. So, in that regard, team Hayek for sure.

But then—and this is getting more to the bulk of what you were just saying—one other major difference between them is that Hayek is definitely much more methodologically eclectic and particularly open to empiricism. Whereas Mises will want to much more, as you say, systematically and austerely derive every truth claim he makes through a purely aprioristic, transcendental, and basically Kantian epistemology.

Nick Land: Right, yes. I think this is a very good insight actually. It is that *Human Action* is almost like rewriting—I don't know if you want to say expansion, concretion at least of—the second critique. I think that you're totally right about it. What is a systematic, transcendental exposition of practical reason? That is *Human Action*. So I think that I totally agree with you about that.

Vincent Lê: Yeah, definitely. That's exactly how I'm conceiving of it. And on that note of Mises' strictly transcendental methodology: one insight from him in particular—I guess Austrian praxeology more generally—that, at least the way I'm thinking about it at this point, I definitely would want to maintain, but that I think—correct me if I'm

wrong—but I think you've started to diverge from recently and in some of what you just said as well, is that I would want to maintain that capitalism is universal or transcendental. And therefore, I guess it's in some sense not threatened. It can't be threatened politically.

By capitalism here, I think it's comprised of two formally distinct components. Firstly, capitalism is this transcendental means-ends reversal by which the means of production become an ultimate end in themselves. Essentially, market competition between producers compels them to invest the vast bulk of their profits, not in their own consumption, but in improving the means of production to stay competitive and produce more profits to be reinvested into the means of production again in this positive feedback loop of improving the means of production as an end in itself. So that's the first component that I think is transcendental.

Secondly, capitalism is also the determination of when genuine improvements in the means of production have taken place through competitive selection. So the way that you determine—or capitalism determines—whether a real advancement in the means of production has been achieved is by getting a multiplicity of different types of investment in the means of production, different technologies, to compete, and seeing which ones practically win out over others as communicated through competitive price signals of lower production costs, cheaper goods, and higher profits.

When I'm referring to capitalism, when it's understood as means-end reversal and the means as an end pursued through competitive selection, when understood in that way, I do think capitalism is a universal and necessary condition of possibility for just practical reason in Kant's terms—or in Mises' terms, for just goal-directed action.

The reason for that really goes further back than the Austrians, too. Even if Nietzsche does not call it capitalism, that basic dynamic that I just described I think was originally articulated by his doctrine of the will to power. That's been the focus of my previous work, like my PhD thesis and so on. The key insight of the will to power as I see it—and as I think you do too from what you've said about it in the past—is that basically the power that we've traditionally taken to be a secondary, instrumental means of pursuing supposedly more primary ends of our choosing is actually just our fundamental end all along. So the will to power is that means-ends reversal. Moreover, I think that what's so decisive about Nietzsche is, in his writings on the ancient Greek

agon, on modern experimental, trial-and-error science in his middle works, and on natural selection, you also get an account of how this ultimate end of power is pursued precisely through competition or competitive selection processes.

So then why the Austrians have become so important for me, and particularly Mises, is I think the will to power receives—at least in the Western intellectual traditions that I'm familiar with—its most systematic articulation with the Austrian School, and specifically with Mises' and other Austrians' account of how acting agents necessarily use certain means in the pursuit of certain ends. That is, all goal-directed agents are always drawing upon means in the pursuit of ends, as well as calculating the profits and losses or successes and failures of those pursuits through competition.

Today, just to give one last articulation of this, we of course get this in a much more distorted, I would say, and imperfect form. Nonetheless, we get something like this in philosophy of AI. I'm thinking of Bostrom, Stephen Omohundro, and the AI safetyists. What they call "the instrumental convergence thesis": that any intelligence with any goal whatsoever will invariably pursue certain subgoals as a universally useful means of achieving its primary goals. You don't get that those subgoals are best optimized through competition. You don't get that in Bostrom and Omohundro. But you definitely get something like this means-ends reversal, although I don't think they actually fully make the reversal.

In any case, I'll shut up in a second. I'm not saying that all three of those articulations are identical, and I'm not necessarily actually agreeing with all of them in their original forms. But based on something like those kinds of transcendental arguments, I would maintain that capitalism—strictly understood as means-ends reversal and competitive selection—is a universal and necessary condition of possibility for any goal-directed intelligence.

Just one other qualification I would make—a bit of a concession as well perhaps—is that I do think that it would be worth distinguishing the phenomenon that's usually described as modern industrial capitalism. Let's say the historical mode of production since, I don't know, roughly the 17th century or so. I think it is worth distinguishing that as something like the highest cultivation or maximal actualization of those transcendental conditions that I was describing. So maybe here I think there's some wiggle room for your more recent contention that certain liberally inclined

populations or Protestant inclined populations facilitate modern capitalism, understood more narrowly as the maximal actualization of these conditions. At the same time, I would still want to maintain that every goal-directed agent or intelligence instantiates—or at least suboptimally realizes—capitalism in that broader, more transcendental sense, to lesser or greater degrees of participation. Capitalism remains for me always there, at least as a kind of constant transcendental attractor or potentiality, basically a transcendental regulative ideal towards which all individual intelligences constantly gravitate without necessarily all of them fully actualizing it to the same degree. If that makes sense.

Nick Land: Yeah, I agree with a huge amount of that to a massive extent, like triple underline it. But the rejoinder I would have to this—this is really stratifying where neoreaction started—was basically with the tragedy of libertarianism. Everything you've said, as I say, I have massive sympathy with. It's very resonant with, I think, the most interesting type of Austrian, libertarian, economic thinking. As you say, it has that transcendental theme that you can trace so clearly through Mises.

But it's like, you know, all of that except: where did it all go wrong? Okay, we now have LLMs. I think, you know, from where I am right now, that there was a certain amount of neoreactionary despair that maybe I would see as a bit overstated in the sense that it really looked to me—this was a general thing, to Peter Thiel—as if capitalism was just being destroyed by the political process. So, obviously, that destruction was not entirely comprehensive, as goes without saying.

On the other hand, it's equally the case that we've seen nothing like a libertarian social model. A political leader like Milei in Argentina who even comes close to that and is just tendentially on that path, but obviously for a pure Austrian economist, would look like he was a piker who was just getting started. You know, he's an anomalous, extremely problematic figure. Who knows how it's all going to work out? Bless him, I hope it goes well. Which is just to say, to the tragedy of libertarianism: the fact that it actually said to people, "look, can't you see that this is the way to do capitalism and it's the only way that makes sense? It's philosophically utterly compelling. It's the only way it makes sense. Why don't we do it?" And they're driven entirely to the margin of the social and political and ideological space. You know, all over the world, it's this huge trash of productive output is redirected rather than being fed back into the

capitalist machine, to do more capitalism. It's just capitalism is treated as a goose that lays the golden eggs and those golden eggs are going to be spent on a whole bunch of other completely unpredictable, very substantially counterproductive social projects. So, just being in this very kind of cruel, concrete, sociocultural historical model, neoreaction actually started with the fact that libertarians aren't leading us anywhere. We've got to go back to the drawing board because, yes, they understand what would work. But that's not what's happening, and they have no way of getting it to work. And any confident, meta-libertarian, Austrian, metaphysical framework that actually takes place at some cosmic level that has to ultimately work—because it's the only thing that makes sense, and the only thing that makes sense is what has to happen—is in some sense deluded.

As you're saying with Nietzsche, I go with you all the way with Nietzsche—except that Nietzsche's pathos is to say: we're drowning in sickness. The last man is a degenerate. It's not that, having seen this machinery, we're just on this ascendant pathway of will to power. It's that we're in this state of absolute cultural and historical crisis that requires some dramatic, extraneous input like the thought of eternal recurrence, some selective mechanism that's going to drive the sick to abandon existence or whatever it is. That's my response to this.

Let me just take also one other thing—I think a complimentary angle to this—which is this thing that Deleuze and Guattari take from Pierre Clastres: this notion that capitalism is always this virtual thing haunting human societies, and all human societies should be understood as mechanisms fending off the capitalistic potential. I think this is really important. I think that capitalism has to be understood in a certain sense as being this anomalous breakout phenomenon. It has to be understood negatively in some sense as a failure of human society.

I say that with particular relevance to China. What's the difference talking about the Chinese and, I don't know, the English? The Chinese now seem extremely good at doing capitalism under certain conditions. But the Chinese were stupendously good at stopping capitalism happening. You know, they required a century of humiliation, this massive cultural and historical trauma over this extended period, in order to finally allow this thing to escape containment.

Okay, capitalism was leading, then immediately they tried to shut it down again, then we're on to 100 million dead people, and it seems to escape containment again with Deng Xiaoping. And then I think people now say: well look, you don't understand China if you think that Xi Jinping and the current regime are still on this reform and opening trajectory that's just capitalism escaping containment. It's like the whole thing is to constantly think: are we able to lock it back down again?

So China is an extreme case in the sense that, if there was a world in which the West just collapsed and, you know, the most morbid of its cultural trends were protracted to the point where it just totally lost it and China gained global hegemony, I don't think —from the point of view of capital escapology—that would be a good outcome. I think that what would happen with the pressure off, with competition off, with the Chinese regime having a free hand to decide on its cultural and historical destiny, that the genius, the Chinese people, at that level of superordinate socialization, will be put into a neocontainment apparatus…

Insofar as I've got to think about the hanging modes, what I think about them is kind of negative—negative technically, not negative morally. It's negative in the sense that I think that they are congenitally disposed to more containment operations. In particular, they can maximise social coordination problems. Capitalism as a subphenomenon is basically the exploitation of the coordination problem.

So, you know, just the crudest possible narrative on this is everything is totally fragmented. The city states couldn't agree on what they wanted between themselves. Technicians and military engineers could go from one city state to another to peddle their thing. If it gave them an advantage against the other city states, it would make a difference. So capitalism got started by exploiting coordination problems in Northern Italy and from there exploiting coordination problems is then the whole game of it. It just follows all the way through to the final period.

Sorry, I don't know whether this seems like a coherent response to what you're saying. But I'm just saying that containment problems—and maybe we're actually back to this question of the re-territorialization thing. I don't know whether it's the same, but I think the restoration of containment is the other side of the story that you've just told so eloquently. The transcendental, accelerative core of the capitalist machine is coupled with this other thing, and it's only able to express itself when this other thing

is rendered impotent and kept offstage. And it's difficult to do that. Just to repeat, the neoreactionary despair is that that containment process just seemed to be reassembling itself in the West.

Vincent Lê: On that note of neoreactionary despair, some of what you were saying reminded me of another version of this antinomy—I mean that in a loose sense—that we were talking about earlier. You've got the AI safety version of the apocalypse, which now we're talking about absolute neoreactionary despair of total collapse. And then we've got the simulation hypothesis version of the end and that's more being on the transcendental side of capital, you know, just trust the plan, trust the transcendental plan. So we have a similar tension there.

I guess the response I have is—I'll try and be brief, and this is going to be tentative. Because I'm trying to resolve that tension at the level of the transcendental, not in terms of history or political history. If, as I was suggesting, capitalism is the transcendental, how is it even possible that it can be contained? At least the way I am starting to see it, again, I would maintain that capitalism is the transcendental. That is the plan. We're stuck on this track that is capitalism and we can't get off it. But then thinking about how politics comes into this… I've never actually described how I conceive of these dynamics as accelerationist, because I actually don't find the term that useful for describing the transcendental process of capital. But where the name acceleration is quite fitting is I think that explains what politics is in the sense that we're stuck on this track that is capital, that is the transcendental. We can't get off it, but then we can, there is a kind of volition that we have—or at least collectively have—through politics, which is not to get off the track, but we can speed it up or slow it down, accelerate it or decelerate it. So political will becomes a question of speed—and what containment would be I guess is the maximal version of political deceleration or exercise of political will. But I still trust the plan.

Nick Land: Yeah, I think that you've got it exactly right. I'm not saying we're back into Calvinism, although of course I think we are. That is for sure the optic that comes to mind on this, because on one side it's like the reason to not be theoretically despairing about the future of capitalism is that capitalism has already taken the future and is flowing back to us. In a sort of radical version of that, we're just being simulated

within the future of capitalism as we speak. So it's all over. And I totally take that transcendentally.

Usually, the notorious problem between providence and agency in Calvinism is exactly the struggle, the kind of proto-struggle with this same problem. You can see agency and politics are somehow being put together with, as you say, trust the plan. The fact that obviously you're not going to surprise God. There's a providential ordination of all things that is not in the order of historical time. However the specifics of the articulation. Obviously, there's a specific way that's articulated within Calvinist theology and I think that that's actually fundamental. I think that's what Calvinist theology was for: to let the culture think through these things. And it's notoriously unresolved. It's notoriously unresolved. There's a temptation to say that Calvinism simply annihilates agency. There is no agency. It solves this problem by just simply saying that there is no human freedom. That simply can't be right. I mean, that's just simplifying things. Just because of course Calvinism can't pre-apocalyptically come to a clear, lucid, and compelling explanation of how agencies cross-code within theological time does not mean that it's abandoned—as it's obviously the question that cannot be abandoned. It's a commitment that is completely inescapable.

I've drifted off a little bit. But I think that the articulation of politics and transcendental capitalism that you're laying out is basically the same. I think that, within Calvinist theology, it's this recognizable problem. It's like you've got agency on one side. Within the agency, on the agent side, the future is undetermined. Maybe everything will fail. Maybe we undermine the plan. Maybe the plan will not work. Maybe we can surprise God. Maybe we can disappoint God. But obviously on the other side, that's nonsensical. And the other side is the stronger side. But if you're going to just have a working rough scheme of things, then you go first of all with divine sovereignty and providence and treat agency as the difficult problem to be scrabbled at.

Vincent Lê: I'm actually glad you brought Calvinism into this, because that's exactly how I was conceiving of this politics of speed. I think I said this before we started recording, but when I first started writing about your work on accelerationism, I was writing a thesis at the same time on Saint Augustine—and I actually read a bit of Calvin for that, though I certainly have no theological expertise in any of that. But one

thing that reading that theological tradition helped me grapple with within accelerationist debates—because, I should say, I started writing about your work in 2016, 2017, and so on. So that was when there was still a thing as left accelerationism. And in those debates among the various factions of accelerationism, one of the big left accelerationist queries was: where is the role for agency or the subject in accelerationism, and especially in right accelerationism, or your accelerationism?

For me, confronted with that question at that time, it was actually specifically through the doctrine of predestination that I was trying to grapple with that. In terms of capitalism, that is the destination, the final destination that we can't escape from. That's already set. But the specific thing in Calvin that helped me grapple with this was—I mean, maybe a Calvinist scholar might have to correct me. But from what I remember, which is very vaguely now, there are passages where Calvin says that there is room for a certain kind of volition, which is, yes, you're predestined, but you in a sense get to choose how you feel about that. So there is this moment of subjective volition. I would translate that onto this capital versus politics split where, yes, capitalism is the final destination, but then there's still this small room for volition at the level of political will essentially.

I think you could also translate it in terms of philosophy of AI. If capitalism is AI, is a kind of really existing advanced artificial intelligence, even a superintelligence in the making, then what is politics? Politics is an AI safety project. It is the friendly AI project. Politics is the various attempts to either regulate this capitalist artificial intelligence, to subordinate it as in, say, Keynesian social democracy and fascism, or to just completely negate it as in communism.

I guess what I'm getting from you here that I definitely will have to think about more is that those are the three friendly AI projects as I see it. They are communism, fascism, and social democracy. But I think what you're getting at is that—to keep it in these terms—there's a fourth friendly AI project, which is sovereign property. Or the cathedral.

Nick Land: I'm not sure. Let me just see. Sorry, I'm moving on because there's a lot of interesting stuff that you're saying here all car crashing in my mind. I'm just going to isolate out the last little thing about this which we left unresolved. There's a question about sovereign property and the cathedral. The cathedral is, you know, it catalyzes. It

catalyzes Moldbug's sovereign property because it's extremely toxic. In his terms, power is unformalized. Everyone says he starts out on this whole arc. He calls it formalism, which is to say that the problem is it's not been formalized. So power… It's actually superordinate over property, over capital even in his understanding, because of the fact that it could just do communism. Like you say, it could be any of these things, could be any of these—crossing over, AI safety and anti-capitalism I think we can agree are at least strongly analogous, if not exactly the same thing. So, yes, social democracy, fascism, communism, all of those things are manifestations of the fact that there is a kind of superordinate power for which your liberal, libertarian, capitalistic property rights are just granted as a permission. There's a structure of permission at a higher level.

And so who is granting that permission? Here we are with the cathedral. This is where the king becomes the king. Who is actually the superordinated instance here? It is the cathedral. It's the complex of the universities, the NGOs, bureaucracy, the media, that actually are finally deciding on property rights, and for which libertarians are their bitch. I mean libertarians get to do as much pure capitalism as the cathedral decides. So, in a certain sense, you're strictly, technically right that Moldbug is saying the cathedral implicitly is this constellation of sovereign property. But it's completely unformalized. So here's the formal sense: what we should do is just say, "just admit that you have all this power and the economic power that you're constantly bitching and worrying about, like secondary property, properly accounted property." There can be unaccounted property and there's this rigorously accounted property, and you need a coherent calculus that puts those things together onto the same balance sheet. Just to take an instance, the *New York Times* has massive power. It can destroy or create companies. It can take property rights away through its influence on the political process. So we should just put a number on that. We will actually formalize an economy in which all of these people who have this control over the capitalistic process explicitly have their power denominated in fungible terms across primary and secondary property.

So, yes, that is the sense in which sovereign property is the key. The key to it is the most toxic possible sense of sovereign property, because it is the unformalized. Moldbug's whole neocameralist thought experiment is about a society in which there is no unformalized sovereign property. That's what makes it desirable. It's the fact that

there's not any free-flowing sovereign property that hasn't been formalized and therefore is—I mean, he doesn't say a lot about this, but—implicitly tradeable. But it really is within a higher system of property rights, which would be basically the stock of the sovereign corporation that can be traded and would produce these corporate control rights within that framework.

So, I would say I don't think it's really quite that this is the sort of property that is to be put alongside social democracy, communism, fascism. I don't think they're sovereign property. I think it's rather that there's this issue of sovereign property, and communism, social democracy, and fascism are all particular ways of negotiating the reality of the implicit sovereign property. None of those systems is sovereign property, properly formalized.

So, you know, communism covers a lot of different regimes. But the classic, post-revolutionary Russian Soviet regime is effectively that the communist party just has complete sovereign property rights over the whole of society. Because it's unapologetic about that, all secondary property rights are basically abolished. Until we get the New Economic Programme and we're already under Lenin saying, hang on, let's be realistic and pragmatic and practical. And then we're into your transcendental dynamic of capitalism reasserting itself, which is saying you simply cannot do this unless you want everyone to starve. Unless you want every other country in the world to just screw you and all your people to starve, then you have to just acknowledge the inevitability of a capitalistic mechanism of some kind.

Obviously, in a much more successful and coherent form, then you get the same thing with Deng Xiaoping. Again, the current regime in China, the CCP, basically has massive, dominant sovereign property rights over the whole society, but with some recognition that it shouldn't do communism. It should instead do a Leninist NEP but massively expanded and on a much more sophisticated level, in which you recognize the superiority of capitalist economic dynamics under the sovereign authority of the party. At any time, they could just tear the whole thing down, but, assuming they're not idiots, they don't.

Sorry, as usual, there's a lot going on here. But I guess the minimal of what I'm saying is just to contest this orchestration that there's this separate sovereign property

option. I think sovereign property, as Moldbug's trying to do it, far from being another decelerative option, is meant to be a formalization of the true accelerational trend.

Vincent Lê: Right.

Nick Land: If you do properly formalize sovereign property, then you get untrammeled capitalist dynamics across the whole social spectrum, rather than untrammeled capitalist dynamics within a field that is set by some superordinate configuration of sovereign property.

Vincent Lê: Okay, that clarifies it. Because the whole move of, in your comparison to Marx's decimation of political economy and the labour theory in Smith and Ricardo's formulation, comparing this concept of sovereign property in Yarvin to that—at that point, it can't really be at the level of, it's not just a fourth option in terms of these forms of anti-capitalism—

Nick Land: Another mode of deceleration. Or another mode of partial containment.

To be continued in Part 3…

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Robert Shepherd Robert Shepherd's Stack of Stuff 2d

Liked by Vincent Lê

I am very much on the outside of these conversations looking in— but it always seems to me that the missing concept in these conversations is "fitness," in the Darwinian sense.

There was a recent British evolutionary biologist whose name I've forgotten, who said: an economy is just a fitness landscape; nothing more.

It optimises whatever survives, and what survives is often weird, confusing and not at all what we might expect. It is totally blind and often will end up driving itself into catastrophe. There is no reason to think the organisms inside the fitness landscape will benefit from its emergent logic on the long run.

That's kind of where I am with my really hazy understanding of Hayek. I think it's plainly true that economics works in incomprehensible ways which we can't control or understand. But "therefore we should leave it alone" seems almost like a category error to me— the reactions against it are as much an emergence from this landscape as any libertarian desire is.

But I also think there's no obvious reason why accelerating a fitness landscape always ends anywhere good? Sometimes they really do just blow themselves up. It's not even clear that you accelerate a landscape you don't understand by being an accelerationist. I don't know that the looking glass is entirely breached with these guys; their inhuman world retains too much human will.

"Why have our human designs failed in the system that says human designs will come to ruin?" Gee, I don't know, libertarians. Maybe there is insufficient humility at the implications there.

I always think of peacocks, with their lovely tails. It would be wrong to say that the Will and Desire of Peacock in his eternal wisdom played no part in creating them. In a sense, the tail is the result of a process involving an enormous number of peacock stories, and a lot of additional forces as well. How can we reconcile the peacock account of the world with the wider world outside it? Well... by fundamentally disagreeing that there's any distinction in the first place; the stories mould to the world as much as the tail. I'm probably missing something, but in that light it all seems resolved

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2 replies by Vincent Lê and others

Jericho Dean Society of Reform 2d

Liked by Vincent Lê

Very interesting section of the interview. I think the comment about goal-directed intelligence (with industrial society or "capitalism" as a purer stage) gets towards what I was aping at with my deism comment before. Calvin can be guilty of this "discovered rationality" being used to constrain

(retroactive necessity- another Zizekianism) what humans can only ever see as an absolute arbitrary greater externality, but I think that's a sin of the pulpit, not the theology. its exactly this predictive necessity- a chain of being from bacterium to man- that I find so blasphemous, essentially imposing the inside as necessary on the big outside, castrating it in the mirrror, and then assuming and dismissing the physiology and biography of the inside because it appears external, as a projection.

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